

Homelessness Survival Guide

**Resources for Building
a Better Tomorrow**

January 2016
Developed by:
The Lower Bucks CSP Committee



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Introduction

In the Fall of 2013, when the Lower Bucks Community Support Program (LB CSP) began meeting there were several regular attendees who were homeless. Because of their courage in speaking up to let the committee know what they were experiencing, other CSP members shared that they too had experienced homelessness in their past.

Over the course of the next 6 months, members continued to share various aspects of their experiences, educating the LB CSP committee on the many struggles homeless individuals face. As a result the committee worked on identifying ways they could make a difference on the issue of homelessness in our community.

In June 2014 Bucks County CSP held a county-wide Housing Forum. The goal was to gather information on what services and resources currently exist in our community for individuals with mental health issues who needed housing assistance/supports. After that we started development of this pamphlet—to bring together the resources that individuals who are homeless can use to survive while they are on the streets. Resources our homeless members told us are quite hidden and may take months or years to stumble upon.

We hope that this pamphlet will serve a vital role in connecting individuals with the resources that exist to assist with some of the struggles faced while homeless and the resources that can help build a better tomorrow.

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Getting Started

Housing Link

The Housing Link is a system which provides a centralized intake (*single-point-of-entry*) and a coordinated assessment process (*including standardized eligibility, needs determination and referral*) for persons experiencing a housing/shelter crisis in Bucks County. The Housing Link Call Center is staffed Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday from 8:30am – 7:30pm. Tuesday until 4:30pm. Voicemail is available 24/7 during non-business hours or if staff members are helping other callers. Messages are typically returned by the next business day.

Housing Link Number is: 1-800-810-4434

What happens when I call the Housing Link?

Callers will be asked a brief series of screening questions that will take approximately 15 minutes to complete over the phone.

If screening questions indicate the caller is not qualified for assessment, other referrals and resources will be provided as appropriate.

For many individuals, the phone screening indicates that an in person, comprehensive assessment is necessary. These individuals will be called back by the assessment agency and an appointment is scheduled at the location convenient to them.

The comprehensive assessment appointment will last

approximately 1 hour, and you will be asked to bring documentation to verify program eligibility.

This assessment helps determine the programs and most appropriate type of assistance for which you are eligible.

Types of assistance

- ◆ Temporary rental assistance to prevent eviction
- ◆ Utility, medication, food assistance in order to prevent non-payment of rent
- ◆ Transitional & supportive housing programs
- ◆ Homeless Shelter Placement

Many of the housing services in Bucks County can only be accessed by using this Housing Link number and going through the screening and assessment process. This eliminates an individual needing go through an application process for multiple agencies/programs by doing one comprehensive assessment that will determine which programs in the county you are eligible for.

Please Note: Clarity, Patience & Persistence are

needed—The Housing link averages over 400 calls per month. So it may take some time for calls to be returned. Please make sure you are very clear when you leave your name and phone number for a return call; in fact it is helpful if you repeat the number at least twice. Please make sure your phone's voicemail is set up, that there is room for messages and that you check your messages regularly. If you have not had a return call within 2 business days call back and leave your contact number and information again.

Resources for Other Crisis Situations

Homelessness can cause many other problems or be a result of other problems you or a loved one are experiencing. In addition to making contact with the Housing Link to see if there are programs or supports to help you regain housing, you may need to utilize one or more of the following resources to help you if the stresses you are dealing with reach a crisis level.

- ◆ National Suicide Prevention Line - 1-800-273-8255
- ◆ Bucks County Mental Health 24 hr - 1-800-499-7455
Crisis Intervention Services
- ◆ Children's Crisis Support - 1-877-435-7709
- ◆ Valley House Youth Shelter - 215-442-9760
- ◆ A Woman's Place Hotline - 1-800-220-8116

For other social service, mental health, and health care support services that may be of help to you, please see the resource card on the back page of this pamphlet.



Outreach Programs

Lower Bucks:

Advocates for Homeless & Those in Need - (AHTN)

215-550-3868 | www.ahtn.org

AHTN is an interfaith, non profit organization that serves the homeless and those in need by providing year long access to emergency shelter, food and other life-sustaining services, with dignity and compassion. The Transportation Mission provides bus rides to Code Blue shelters and year long meals at houses of worship. Those in Need Mission provides temporary help connecting individuals with resources such as clothing, emergency shelter, food, diapers & formula, rent assistance, prescriptions, utility payment, gas for cars to get to or find work, transportation to doctors, hospitals, mental health appointments, laundromat or court hearings.

Central Bucks:

Coalition to Shelter Support the Homeless - (C2SSH)

215-550-3578 | www.c2ssh.org

C2SSH is an alliance of faith-based and community service organizations working to assist unsheltered adults in Central Bucks County, PA. Their first priority is to provide shelter on Code Blue nights. Homeless individuals are also connected to needed resources such as food, clothing, healthcare and education.

**Upper Bucks:
Outreach Care:**

215-804-5869 | qtownoutreachcare@gmail.com

Provides temporary emergency shelter, linkages to resources for food, clothing, employment, housing. May be able to assist with transportation. Also provides ongoing meetings to help support an individual's efforts toward self sufficiency.

**Projects for Assistance in Transitioning from
Homelessness - (PATH)**

215-750-9643 ext. 1521 | ksmothers@penndelmhc.org

The PATH program is an outreach program that assists homeless individuals who are also diagnosed with a mental illness and/or have a co-occurring disorder to get linked to mental health treatment, case management support, food, clothing, and housing programs.

In order to qualify for PATH services the individual must be a resident of Bucks County, present with a history of mental illness or co-occurring disorder, and be homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless. Referrals are accepted from other agencies and from individuals themselves.

**Sunday Breakfast Rescue Mission (SBRM) Homeless
Outreach Coordinator**

215-800-7724 | notte@sundaybreakfast.org

The Outreach Coordinator can help individuals who are homeless or those at risk of homelessness get connected to social services and/or transportation. SBRM is located in Lower Bucks, so their main focus is Lower Bucks but they can support individuals from across the county who are able to get transport to Lower Bucks.

Synergy Project — Youth Street Outreach Program

A program of Valley Youth House

Robert Wood | 215-990-3962
800 North York Road | Warminster, PA 18974

The Synergy Project serves runaway, homeless and street youth between ages **12 and 21**. The Street Outreach Team travels throughout the county connecting youth with the help they need. Youth receive access to emergency shelter, survival aid, counseling, referrals for specialized services, crisis intervention, and education and employment assistance.



Homelessness Survival Resources

- ◆ Lower Bucks 215-550-3868 | www.ahtn.org
- ◆ Central Bucks 215-550-3578 | www.c2ssh.org
- ◆ Upper Bucks 267-450-5191
- ◆ Central & Upper Bucks van routes can also be heard at the Housing Link # - 1-800-810-4434 — option #4 & follow the prompts.

Code Blue Shelters

Code Blue is emergency overnight sheltering for homeless individuals during dangerous temperatures and weather conditions.

- ◆ **Code Blue season is December 1st thru March 31st**
- ◆ The County of Bucks officially calls a Code Blue when the county feels it is a threat to public health and public safety based on temperature, wind chill and precipitation.
- ◆ Local organizations may also call a Code Blue when the temperature forecast is 26° or below including wind chill & precipitation factors. (This varies by organization)
- ◆ Various churches host Code Blue shelters. Generally each church will host for one month at a time.
- ◆ It takes many **volunteers** to staff a Code Blue shelter opening. 15-18 (Lower Bucks), 12-15(Central & Upper Bucks)
- ◆ All volunteer positions **must** be filled in order for a Code Blue shelter to **open**.

How to Find Out if a Code Blue Shelter is Open?

The determination if a shelter will be open is made by 1pm each day during the Code Blue season. To find out if there is a Code Blue shelter opening for a specific evening call the following numbers in the area you are located:

How a Night Works:

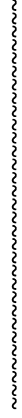
- ◆ The shelter opens at 9pm (LB & UB) / 7:30 pm (CB) Guests may drive in, walk in, or ride the van—see Van Transport below.
- ◆ Upon arrival, guests are assisted with intake paper work, given bedding, and directed to meal and sleeping area.
- ◆ Lights out at 11:00 pm. Wake up is at 6:00 am.
- ◆ 6:00 am – 7:00 am light breakfast and preparation for departure. (in Central Bucks only - sandwiches for lunch are available upon request).
- ◆ If transportation was provided individuals are taken back to the stop where they were picked up.

Code Blue Guest Criteria:

- ◆ No one under the age of 18
- ◆ No drugs, no weapons, no alcohol
- ◆ Cannot be under the influence of drugs or alcohol to the extent that the individual is a danger to themselves or others.
- ◆ All guests are read the Guest Code of Conduct & must sign it.

Van Transport to A Code Blue Shelter:

The volunteer organizations that help staff Code Blue shelters also provide some transportation to the shelter via pre-determined bus routes. To find out where the van stops are for pick up use the contact information for finding out if a Code Blue shelter is open.



Food Resources

Community /Shared Meals

Free Community/Shared Meals are available to those in need, not just individuals who are homeless, through a network of faith-based organizations.

In Lower Bucks there are approximately 28 meals per month provided. There is no need to sign up for these meals you can just show up. A current list of the location & times of meals are on the website of the Advocates for the Homeless and Those in Need at: www.ahtn.org. If you don't have access to the internet you can call AHTN at 215-550-3868.

In Central Bucks there is one meal per month held on the first Sunday of each month from 2am-4am at Trinity Episcopal Church, 2631 Durham Rd., Buckingham PA 18912 (on some GPS's it comes up as Doylestown). The church is on the corner of Rt. 202 and Rt. 413. If you would like transportation through C2SSH then you need to RSVP to Rebecca at rchalfin@yahoo.com.

In Upper Bucks there are about 6 community meals per month. Places where you can find out when & where the meals are located: Outreach Care, contact information on page 9, and the Quakertown Food Pantry 215-536-0240.

Senior Community Center Lunches

If you are 60 years or older you can take advantage of low cost lunches served at one of the 13 local Senior Community Centers. You have to make a reservation for lunch 1 week in advance and cost is generally \$2.00, though some centers operate a "voluntary donation" system. For a list of Senior Centers go to:

www.buckscounty.org/government/HumanServices/AAA/CommunityCenters

Or call the Area Agency on Aging and someone can tell you the Senior Community Center nearest to you:

Area Agency on Aging 267-880-5700.

Food Pantries

Food Pantries provide a supply of emergency food to those in need. Each food pantry is independently run so the rules and process can vary at each site. Generally, you can expect a 3-day supply of unprepared/staple type foods and to sign a declaration that your income is at 150% or below the Federal Poverty Level. Some pantries allow individuals to obtain food 1x per week, others only allow 1x per month. Some require some form of ID to try to ensure you are a Bucks County resident, others are more lenient on this. Some will give out a prepared bag of items and some allow you to pick and choose items. If you are

homeless and do not have the facilities to prepare foods, you should alert the food pantry staff of this — many will make accommodations & provide you with more ready to eat options.

There are about 30 food pantries throughout Bucks County. The Bucks County Opportunity Council has a “Guide to Food Services” in BC which includes a list of local food pantry locations and their hours. Printed copies of the “Guide” can be found at Opportunity Council locations (Quakertown, Doylestown & Bristol) and at food pantries. The information is also listed on their website or you can call the BC Opportunity Council and they will help find the pantry nearest to you:

215-345-8175 ext. 213 | www.bcoc.org

Showers

Lower Bucks

Rejuvenation Station on the 2nd Wednesday every month. Participants can take a shower at a local-faith based organization and have a meal. Space is limited, no more than 13 guests can be accommodated. All guests must come via transport through AHTN bus. The stops for the bus are the same as Wheels to Meals. Contact AHTN for more info and times.

The YMCA in Fairless Hills allows homeless individuals to use their facilities as well. Individuals need to contact AHTN to obtain a referral. Once the YMCA has approved the referral individuals will be notified by AHTN. Upon your first visit you will need to sign a code of conduct agreement. Hours for showering are: M—F 5:30—6:30 am & 7—8:30 am | Sat & Sun 2 –5 pm. You need to check in with the

front desk each time you visit to shower.

Salvation Army in Levittown — will allow showers by appointment — call 215-945-0717. The Levittown Salvation Army is located at 215 Apple Tree Drive, Levittown, PA 19058.

Central Bucks

There is no formal shower program in Central Bucks. Showers can be obtained by contacting the Coalition to Shelter and Support the Homeless whose number is on page 7.

Upper Bucks

For individuals who choose to be guests at Upper Bucks Code Blue shelter there is an arrangement for guests to get showers three days a week from 7:00-7:30 am. Individuals are taken straight to the shower facility from the Code Blue shelter before being returned to their pickup sites. There is no spring/summer/fall shower program in Upper Bucks currently.

Clothing

Many local thrift stores will allow homeless individuals to obtain some clothing for free. However individuals must obtain a “referral” from a mental health or social services agency, their church or one of the homeless outreach organizations listed at the beginning of this pamphlet. The referral is either done by email or a “voucher paper” that is then taken to the thrift store. Thrift store location and hours can be found at:

www.thriftshopper.com/index.htm

Furniture

Bucks County Furniture Bank

215-741-1010 | furniturebank@sundaybreakfast.org

The Furniture Bank is a partnership of 50 Bucks County agencies and churches, which operates through the **Sunday Breakfast Rescue Mission's** Pennndel Thrift Store. Furniture, housewares, and clothing are made available to individuals who were once homeless and are referred to the furniture bank by a church, agency or outreach worker.

Other Survival Supplies

Things such as tents , blankets, hygiene kits can sometimes be obtained through the Outreach Organizations listed on pages 8-10 of this pamphlet.

In Central Bucks the Coalition to Shelter and Support the Homeless has a Summer Survival Backpack Program. They provide backpacks that include a tent, sleeping bag, cooking gear, fuel cubes, water containers, rain poncho, space blanket, first aid kit and an outdoor survival guide. They can also help individuals obtain bikes for transportation to jobs.

Women's Resources

If you are pregnant and homeless there are places you can get pre-natal healthcare to help ensure the health of your baby.

Mother Bachman Maternity Center

2560 Knights Road (Bensalem Square)
Bensalem, PA 19020
215-245-4334

Provides prenatal and delivery services to uninsured and underinsured women. Other services include case management, nutritional education, smoking cessation, WIC, prenatal and parenting classes, genetic counseling, transportation assistance, and follow-up care. The Maternity Center also assists pregnant homeless women in securing emergency housing, provides financial counseling and accessing any other resources for which they may be qualified.

Healthy Beginnings Plus

Provides prenatal care, postpartum care, and other maternity care services to low-income pregnant women at no cost. Women with incomes up to 185% of federal poverty guidelines may be eligible. They can also assist you in applying for medical assistance if you cannot afford care.

Program care includes: laboratory and ultrasound testing, pregnancy education classes, nutritional counseling, specialized prenatal care for alcohol and drug abuse, referrals for smoking cessation classes and addictions counseling, and post-partum care visits by a trained visiting nurse.

Healthy Beginnings Plus at Grandview Hospital:

215-453-4077

Healthy Beginnings Plus at Doylestown Hospital:

215-345-2400.

Pregnancy and Substance Use

If you are pregnant please know that any amount of alcohol or drug use can have very profound effects on your unborn child. Please use the resource card included with this pamphlet to get connected to resources to help you stop your substance use for you and your baby.

The Council of Southeast PA 1-800-221-6333

Abuse, Victimization & Domestic Violence Resources

If you are dealing with victimization, abuse or domestic violence the following 24 hour hotlines may also be of help to you. Please note **all** of these resources provide services to both **men and women**.

A Woman's Place 1-800-220-8116

Provides free, confidential service, support, education, outreach, and advocacy to victims of domestic violence and their children.

Network of Victim's Assistance 1-800-675-6900

Provides free, confidential rape crisis and crime victimization services and advocacy.

Adult Protective Services & Elder Abuse 1-800-490-8505

Investigates reports of abuse/neglect and takes steps to prevent and eliminate abuse for older adults age 60+ and for adults between 18 and 59 years of age who have a physical or mental impairment.

Veteran's Resources

Survival Services

Lower Bucks Disabled Veterans Chapter #117-PA:

5915 Emilie Rd, Levittown PA 19056 | 215-943-7771

Provides services to all veterans (not just disabled). Assists veterans with identifying benefits they are entitled to, fill out forms, and getting connected to other resources for education, employment, clothing. The Drop in Center also serves as a **Code Blue Shelter for Veterans**. They like you to come in by 4pm or earlier on a Code Blue day if you are going to shelter there overnight.

- ◆ Food pantry is open Wed 9am—3pm
- ◆ Soup Kitchen M-W-F 11am –1:30 pm
- ◆ Drop in Service Center Mon - Sat 9am to 3:30/4:00 pm

Re-Housing Services

US Dept of Veteran Affairs, Homeless Outreach Services:

215-823-4077 | Monday to Friday 8 am – 4 pm

The Outreach Program can provide emergency shelter placement (in Phila as there is no VA shelter in Bucks County), placement in a supported housing program for up to 2 yrs, where individuals develop skills to help in transitioning to independent living. The Homeless Outreach program can also assist individuals obtain independent housing if appropriate and provide referrals to other community based services as needed/ appropriate.

Initial phone call will include a screening to verify military service status and program eligibility. Eligible individuals will then go through an assessment process to determine housing needs after which referrals and placements will occur.

Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) - Housing Assistance & More!

For those currently staying in shelters, on couches, in a car, outdoors, or in a transitional housing program, or are in danger of becoming homeless, SSVF can assist veterans and their families in securing housing and developing a housing stability plan to avert or overcome homelessness. Assistance can include: Developing a personal / family plan for permanent housing, identifying housing opportunities and negotiating with landlords, assisting with claims and obtaining VA benefits, obtaining other public benefits, e.g., county or state assistance, accessing benefits from other agencies, including legal assistance, financial counseling, and credit repair, ensuring success via follow-up visits and case management. Depending on need, and the development of the plan, we may be able to provide temporary financial assistance as well.

The SSVF program is provided by two different agencies:

Hope for Veterans:

1-855-483-8466 (24 HOUR HOTLINE)

Veterans Multi Service Center:

610-384-VETS | www.vmcntr.org

Articles about Surviving Homelessness

The Survivalist Blog: This site is geared toward emergency preparedness and survivalist strategies for individuals and families, which includes a guest article with tips on surviving homelessness.

www.thesurvivalistblog.net/how-to-survive-being-homeless/

Survival Guide to Homelessness: This is a blog of a young man who was homeless for 5 years. The blog covers a variety of issues including finding shelter, staying warm, getting cool, hygiene issues, and the emotional issues surrounding homelessness.

www.guide2homelessness.blogspot.com/2004/10/introduction-to-project.html

Other Resources

Bucks County Resources Directory

This is THE most comprehensive listing of health & social service resources in Bucks County. It is compiled by the Bucks County Intermediate Unit and is updated a couple of times a year. Access to the directory is via the internet only: google "Bucks County Resource Directory" or use the following URL:

www3.bucksiu.org/homeless

Human Services Directory of Bucks County

The United Way of Bucks County has developed an online searchable database of human service agencies and services in Bucks County. You can search for an agency name, by a choosing a topic area from a drop down menu or you can type in your own key words. You then can click on any of the organizations that pop up to get more information on their programs and the contact numbers. The following web address will take you directly to the United Way's online search page.

www.uwbucks.org/contact-us/connections/

Bucks County Behavioral Health System Community Resource Pocket Card

About CSP

The Community Support Program (CSP) is a coalition of individuals who receive mental health services, their family members and mental health providers with the Bucks County Department of Mental Health/ Developmental Programs and other County Behavioral Health Organizations in an equal partnership to promote recovery and excellence in the delivery of community based mental health services.

At monthly meetings individuals come together to exchange information /formulate ideas about how all parts of the local community can coordinate assets to offer the most needed services and supports to people who experience mental health challenges and to identify opportunities where people in recovery can contribute in building a better community. Our meetings are open, and any interested individuals are welcomed to attend!

Please check our website for information on a meeting near you!

Contact Us

CSP of Bucks County
2005 Cabot Blvd West, Suite 100
Langhorne, PA 19047

Phone: 267-587-2300 x1104
Email: nscheible@penndelmhc.org
Web: www.cspbucks.org